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ABSTRACT

The place of formal grammar teaching is of secondary importance to developing a personally relevant context for students to practice the language and explore their personal experience. Grammar is essential for mastery of a language. However, the few materials available are not user friendly. Therefore, British tutors developed a bank of resources and procedures for mixed-level groups on formal English grammar in the English for speakers of other languages classroom. The grammar bank was designed to: (1) meet students' needs at most learning levels; (2) be useful for self-directed learning; (3) enable easy assessment; (4) be user friendly; (5) be easy to understand, with instructions included; (6) provide a low-cost resource; and (7) be "adult" and build on skills that students already have. The grammar bank consists of self-access worksheets that cover a number of specific grammar areas. There are worksheets for each area, from simple to advanced: (1) simple and continuous tense; (2) perfect tenses; (3) article, prepositions, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and sentence structure; and (4) phrasal verbs, common expressions, and conditional tenses. A self-assessment checklist enables students to focus on their progress. The grammar bank saves time, improves grammar awareness, is student centered, provides back-up for classroom instruction, provides relevant exercises, and is popular with students. (Three references and examples of grammar bank materials are included.) (NLA)

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A SELF-DIRECTED APPROACH TO ENGLISH GRAMMAR

How can tutors and students tackle the daunting area of formal English grammar in the ESOL classroom? Should they at all? If they do, how is this possible in part-time, mixed level groups? Jane Taylor, ESOL Tutor Organiser and tutor, and Leonard Worth, tutor (retired) of North Bristol Adult Education, Avon, outline a bank of resources and procedures they have been developing for mixed level ESOL groups.

Why Teach Grammar?

> *I hate grammar in general, because it's boring and is of course, so formal! Without imagination! It is all written.*
>
> Maggy (ESOL student)

Like this student, many ESOL tutors have strong negative feelings about the place of formal grammar teaching in their classes. This attitude seems to stem from the rejection by many practitioners of the structural approach of language teaching which was developed in the field of TEFL. Language acquisiton, so the argument goes, can only develop effectively through communicative practice and interaction. Language has to be used, in action, rather than being learned by rote as a system of symbols. And as ESOL tutors work hard to develop an anti-racist syllabus, the place of formal grammar teaching has seemed of secondary importance to developing a personally relevant context for students to practise 'functions' of language and to explore their personal experience.

Despite these reservations, it cannot be denied that a knowledge – implicit or explicit – of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of a language: you cannot use words unless you know how they should be put together. As tutors, we should not withhold information that learners need in order to generate their own language and to become independent. Of course, practice and interaction are essential for communicative competence, but learners also need to become acquainted with the unknown and unaccustomed formal patterns of the new language. As Mirand Britt points out in her article: 'Racism and the Syllabus in the Unemployment Projects' (1986): 'The exclusion of grammar from many ESOL programmes in the past cannot now be justified. It does not seem resonable to expect learners to be able to generalise about language from one situation to another, without some explicit treatment of the rules involved'.

> *When I speak, I often make grammatical mistakes, which are quite simple ones, even though I know it is wrong. I don't know why. Perhaps I've got used to speaking this way.*
>
> Junko (ESOL student)

This student, like many others, has a good grasp of her own learning needs. Unfortunately, for tutors, it is far more difficult to identify good materials that tackle grammar areas in a student-centred way. The few ESOL books on the market tend to be function or topic based. EFL books are notoriously formal, confusing and euro-centric. Even the most recently produced self-access ESOL material is not entirely user friendly.

The History of the Grammar Bank

In our mixed-level ESOL classes in Bristol, as in most classes of this kind, we try to meet a range of needs – educational, training, employment, political, social – in sessions of two hours per week! About two years ago, student evaluations kept making the same request: 'more grammar please'. This demand was the catalyst for a complete change in our approach to grammar teaching in the classroom.

At first, we drew up a short list of grammatical areas that students found most problematic. We took this list from a combined assessment of students' writing and speaking. Then, as part of our weekly teaching preparation, we developed some worksheets that covered these areas, from basic level to advanced, which were numbered for easy access. Students completed the first few exercises for homework, and we collected their completed work to be marked. After this initial experiment, we invited the students to

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evaluate the worksheets. On the whole, the idea received positive comments:

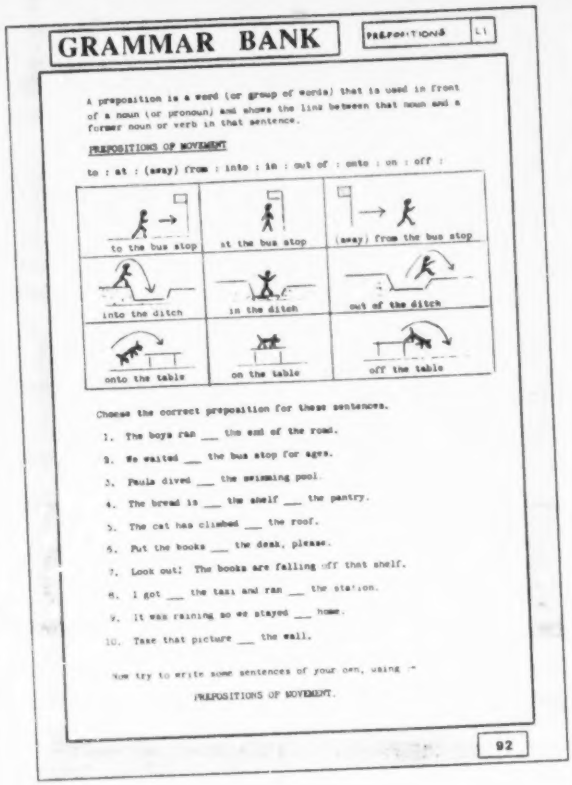
> *'I forgot my grammar, but through this grammar bank, I can recall grammar…'*
>
> *'I can learn different things about the English…'*
>
> (ESOL students)

However, it was suggested that the answers should be made available so that students could check their own work. They didn't want the answers on the back of worksheets – the temptation to cheat being too strong – but to be kept in a well-marked file in the classroom. In addition, the students requested an extended range of grammatical areas covered by the sheets, including areas such as: common expressions, phrasal verbs, prepositional phrases and sentence structure. Now we were onto something: a learning resource for grammar with students at the centre. At this point, we applied for and received an offer of funding to develop our work further.

Aims and Objectives of the Grammar Bank

The Grammar Bank, in its present form, was designed to meet certain criteria. It should:

- Meet the needs of students at most learning levels (post-basic or false-beginner to advanced)
- be completely self-access
- enable easy assessment (both student and tutor)
- be user-friendly (not off-putting/confusing/ethno-centric)
- be easy to understand, with explanation and description sheets
- provide a resource that is relatively low-cost that incurs a once-only expenditure
- be 'adult' and build on skills which students already have.


GRAMMAR BANK

PREPOSITIONS L1

A preposition is a word (or group of words) that is used in front of a noun (or pronoun) and shows the link between that noun and a former noun or verb in that sentence.

PREPOSITIONS OF MOVEMENT

to : at : (away) from : into : in : out of : onto : on : off :

to the bus stop | at the bus stop | (away) from the bus stop

into the ditch | in the ditch | out of the ditch

onto the table | on the table | off the table

Choose the correct preposition for these sentences.

1. The boys ran ___ the end of the road.
2. He waited ___ the bus stop for ages.
3. Paula dived ___ the swimming pool.
4. The bread is ___ the shelf ___ the pantry.
5. The cat has climbed ___ the roof.
6. Put the books ___ the desk, please.
7. Look out! The books are falling off that shelf.
8. I got ___ the taxi and ran ___ the station.
9. It was raining so we stayed ___ home.
10. Take that picture ___ the wall.

Now try to write some sentences of your own, using :

PREPOSITIONS OF MOVEMENT.

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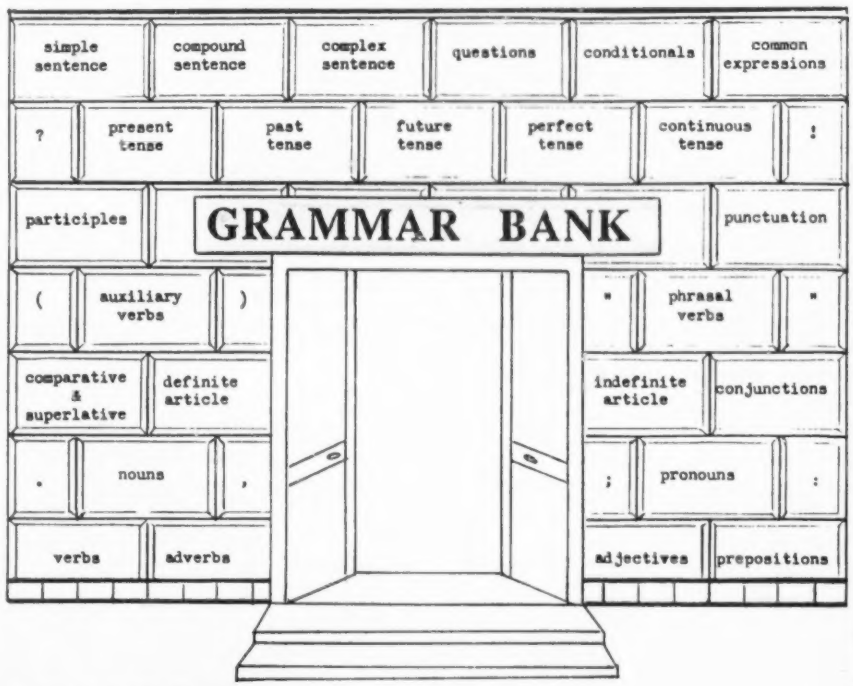
1. Simple and continous tenses
2. Perfect tenses
3. Article; Prepositions; Nouns; Adjectives; Adverbs; Sentence Stucture
4. Phrasal Verbs; Common Expressions; Conditionals.

What does the Grammar Bank consist of?

The up-dated Grammar Bank consists of self-access worksheets which cover a number of separate grammar areas. Each area is easy to find, with a system of headings and numbers. There is an explanation sheet, which is colour coded, for each separate grammar area. There are worksheets for each area at level 1, 2 and 3 from simple to advanced. These sheets have been photocopied within an attractive border.

These sheets are photocopied three times and stored in A4 plastic wallets in ring-clip binders. The present system consists of 4 binders which contain the following areas:



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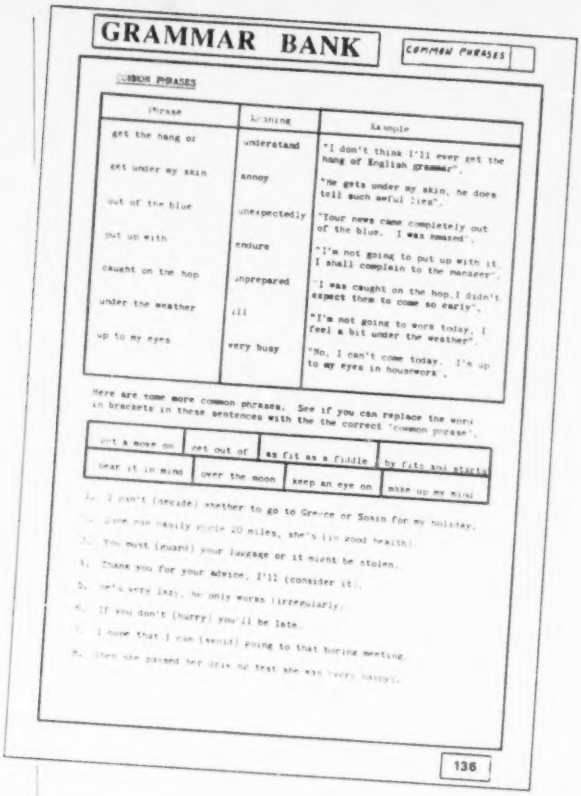

GRAMMAR BANK

COMMON PHRASES

phrase	meaning	example
get the hang of	understand	"I don't think I'll ever get the hang of English grammar".
get under my skin	annoy	"He gets under my skin, he does tell such awful lies".
out of the blue	unexpectedly	"Your news came completely out of the blue. I was amazed".
put up with	endure	"I'm not going to put up with it. I shall complain to the manager".
caught on the hop	unprepared	"I was caught on the hop. I didn't expect them to come so early".
under the weather	ill	"I'm not going to work today, I feel a bit under the weather".
up to my eyes	very busy	"No, I can't come today. I'm up to my eyes in housework".

Here are some more common phrases. See if you can replace the word in brackets in these sentences with the the correct 'common phrase'.

put a move on	get out of	as fit as a fiddle	by fits and starts
bear it in mind	over the moon	keep an eye on	make up my mind

1. I can't (decide) whether to go to Greece or Spain for my holiday.
2. She can easily cycle 20 miles, she's in good health!
3. You must (guard) your luggage or it might be stolen.
4. Thank you for your advice, I'll (consider it).
5. He's very lazy, he only works (irregularly).
6. If you don't (hurry) you'll be late.
7. I hope that I can (avoid) going to that boring meeting.
8. When she passed her driving test she was very happy.

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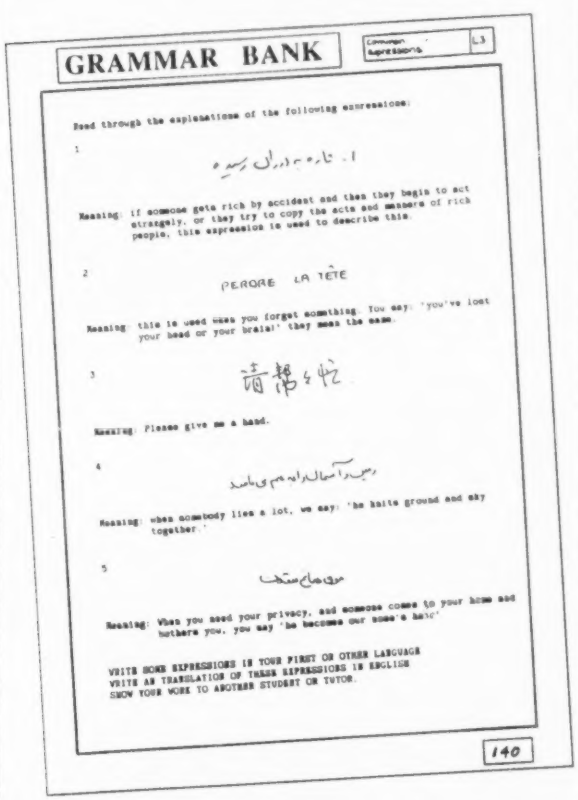

GRAMMAR BANK

Common expressions L3

Read through the explanations of the following expressions:

1

Meaning: if someone gets rich by accident and then they begin to act strangely, or they try to copy the acts and manners of rich people, this expression is used to describe this.

2

PERDRE LA TÊTE

Meaning: this is used when you forget something. You say: 'you've lost your head or your brain!' they mean the same.

3

Meaning: Please give me a hand.

4

Meaning: when somebody lies a lot, we say: 'he hits ground and sky together.'

5

Meaning: When you need your privacy, and someone come to your home and bothers you, you say 'he becomes our guest's hair'

WRITE SOME EXPRESSIONS IN YOUR FIRST OR OTHER LANGUAGE
WRITE AN TRANSLATION OF THESE EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH
SHOW YOUR WORK TO ANOTHER STUDENT OR TUTOR.

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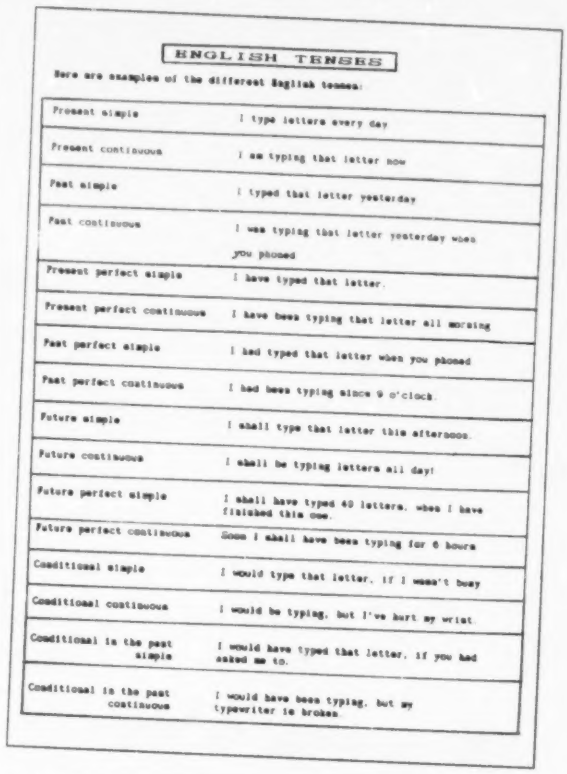
The answers for these worksheets are kept in separate files and have corresponding numbers for easy access. A block of numbers have been allocated for each section so that sheets can be added at a later date. All these files, about 8 in total, are permanently stored in a large plastic storage container in the classroom.

How do students use the Grammar Bank?

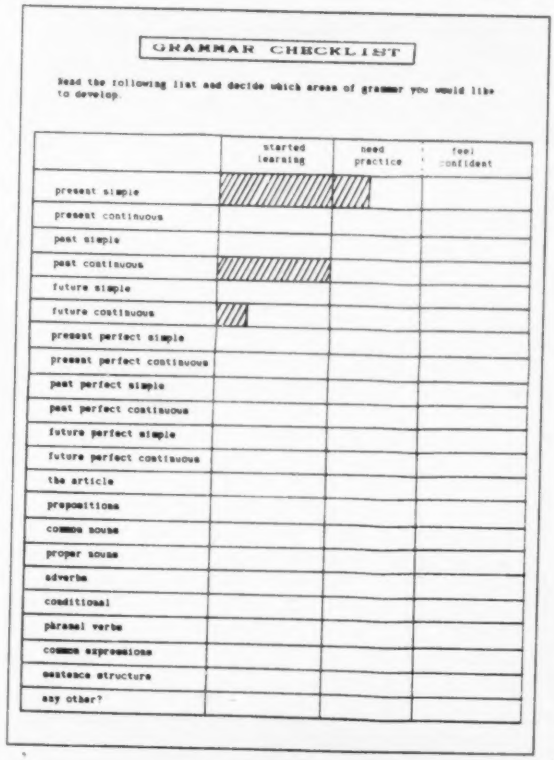
Through experience, the best way of familiarising the students with the Grammar Bank is to let them browse through it and select whatever appeals. We also produced an introductory booklet which includes a grammar checklist, instructions and a diary to record which sheets have been covered. Anticipating that some students might not understand the terminology of grammar in English, we also provided examples of the different English tenses:



ENGLISH TENSES

Here are examples of the different English tenses:

Present simple	I type letters every day.
Present continuous	I am typing that letter now.
Past simple	I typed that letter yesterday.
Past continuous	I was typing that letter yesterday when you phoned.
Present perfect simple	I have typed that letter.
Present perfect continuous	I have been typing that letter all morning.
Past perfect simple	I had typed that letter when you phoned.
Past perfect continuous	I had been typing since 9 o'clock.
Future simple	I shall type that letter this afternoon.
Future continuous	I shall be typing letters all day!
Future perfect simple	I shall have typed 40 letters, when I have finished this one.
Future perfect continuous	Soon I shall have been typing for 6 hours.
Conditional simple	I would type that letter, if I wasn't busy.
Conditional continuous	I would be typing, but I've hurt my wrist.
Conditional in the past simple	I would have typed that letter, if you had asked me to.
Conditional in the past continuous	I would have been typing, but my typewriter is broken.



GRAMMAR CHECKLIST

Read the following list and decide which areas of grammar you would like to develop.

	started learning	need practice	feel confident
present simple			
present continuous			
past simple			
past continuous			
future simple			
future continuous			
present perfect simple			
present perfect continuous			
past perfect simple			
past perfect continuous			
future perfect simple			
future perfect continuous			
the article			
prepositions			
common nouns			
proper nouns			
adverbs			
conditional			
phrasal verbs			
common expressions			
sentence structure			
any other?			

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To enable students to focus on their progress, we also produced a self-assessment checklist. Students are encouraged to shade in the boxes according to how confident they feel about particular grammatical rules.

Each week, students can take 2 to 3 sheets for home study. They record what they have taken, the date and the sheet number. Having finished with the material, the students then replace the sheets and mark their own answers. They also complete the record sheet, marking which worksheets they have returned and listing their comments. This record keeping is particularly useful to the tutor because they can monitor which sheets have been removed and therefore assess the demand for particular areas.

Tutor Evaluation

We have been using this material in ESOL classes for nearly two years. From our own observations and evaluations we are pleased with the results. The Grammar Bank:

- saves a lot of time. Instead of explaining grammar points to the whole class, or even individuals, this resource enables the tutor to target students who might benefit from explanation and practice of a particular area.
- improves 'grammar awareness' and makes the terminology of grammar, in English, less daunting.
- is student-centred. Students in our groups use the worksheets without referring to the tutor, and are often happy to explain the procedure to new members in the group.
- provides useful 'back-up' material for classroom use, particularly if a student or students complete a group activity before others.
- provides instant and relevant exercises for students who have struggled with a particular area of grammar in a piece of written work.
- is extremely popular with students. In our groups, one significant problem was the attempt, by students, to take 25 sheets at once for home study! This had to be re-negotiated to 3 maximum, not only because of availability, but also to enable students to structure their learning.

Student Evaluation

From recent written questionnaires about the Grammar Bank, ESOL students made the following comments:

- *It suits me because I can choose worksheets which is difficult for me.*
- *It's easy to find the ones I want because it is arranged well and the level is different so I can choose according to my level.*
- *I like it because I can check the mistakes.*
- *The description sheets are good because I can learn before I do.*
- *I can get some new words from the worksheets*
- *I can practice many times as its ranged 3 levels, I can do from easy one to difficult.*

Future Developments

This is the kind of resource that is well suited to constant up-dating and development. In Bristol, the next step is to review which worksheets are most popular for particular groups, and to devise additional material for these areas. We will consider the value of devising material at a higher level, to provide an opportunity for learner development and progression. We might develop materials that cover more than one grammar area. We are interested in producing more multi-lingual material.

For other ESOL tutors, the Grammar Bank would provide a well-structured basic teaching resource. However, as each group has a character of its own, tutors can develop individualised sheets for their own students. As always, this process is best initiated by listening to the suggestions of the learners themselves:

> *I'd like some sheets to help with my spelling.*
> *More words of vocabulary and more phrasal verbs.*
> (ESOL students)

In the Bristol group, one student suggested that we could produce some listening tapes to accompany some of the worksheets. This exciting idea has met with an enthusiastic response from other students:

> *I'd like to help my listening ability through listening tapes. That can help me pronounce.*
> (ESOL students)

The Grammar Bank has already been made available to other ESOL tutors in Avon. Clearly, this resource could also be of use for other adult education groups, including ABE groups and 'mainstream' education and training courses. The material would also be suitable for language development in Open Learning Centres and workshops.

Any Concluding Thoughts?

Yes: to stress that this resource has been developed as **part** of an overall strategy for language development. The Grammar Bank was never intended as a grammar course; it should be regarded as a tool to facilitate linguistic and ultimately communicative competence. As Penny Ur explains in her book 'Grammar Practice Activities' (1988): 'the learning of grammar should be seen in the long term as one of the *means* of acquiring a thorough mastery of the language as a whole, not as an end in itself'. The grammar Bank is to be used by students in whatever ways they find most useful.

Grammar For Sale?

The County of Avon is presently considering the commercial production of this resource. If you would like to find out more details about this, or if you would simply like to add your name or institution to the waiting-list for your own copy, please write to:

ESOL Organising Tutor, FEDC, Stiles Acres, Lawrence Weston, Bristol BS11 0QA. Telephone: (0272) 235080

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